

## The Big Bad Wolf

by Libby Taylor

The meadow hummed to the buzz of nature in the fresh heat of spring. Insects fluttered around the assortment of wildflowers scattered across the bed of grass and rodents hopped through its long thick weaves.

The early morning sun was breaking through the gaps of the branches of the trees as the sound of laughter began to echo around the area. Two wolves entered the clearing of the peaceful meadow, playfully knocking into each other as they searched for their breakfast.

“Shh! Stop it now, you are going to scare away our food!” The female wolf said laughing.

The wolves began to scan the area, usually at this time of day deer came to nest on the grass. If they were lucky, they would be taking plenty of food with them back to their burrow.

The female wolf looked around her wearily. “We need to be quick- I hate leaving the children on their own.”

The male wolf sighed. “They’re fine, my love. The humans don’t start their hunt this early in the morning anyway.”

The two wolves lived with their children five miles away from a village occupied by humans. The male humans often travelled in their packs to hunt the wolf kind for sport. Old tales had been passed down through wolf families that these awful creatures kept the heads of innocent wolves on their walls as some kind of trophy.

The male wolf had always thought of these tales as stories to scare cubs, but one day a year or two ago, he was nearly killed himself by humans whilst on a leisurely walk. The male wolf had gotten over the attack, though he made sure to get food for his family too early in the morning for the humans to be on the hunt, and late enough at night for them to be asleep. His wife, however, was spooked by the attack of her husband and hated leaving their burrow at all. Leaving their cubs was even worse.

“There” said the male wolf, “I see them, a small herd of deer behind that bush. You go on that side and I’ll come around this way” he whispered indicating to the left of the bush concealing the poor animals.

The female wolf nodded silently and began to creep around the side of the bush. The oblivious deer happily continued to munch on the fresh grass, unaware of the fate about to be bestowed onto them.

The male wolf looked over to his wife who looked back at him, he nodded his head once; the signal to kill. The two wolves sprang into gear and ran towards their prey, pouncing on them with their sharp teeth and claws. The shrieks of the deer were short lived.

The buzz of the meadow continued.

...

The two wolves took the corpse of a dead deer each. They easily managed to drag them back to their burrow with their teeth in the animals’ neck. When they arrived, they’re children had just

woken up and ran outside to greet their parents. They jumped to lick their mother and father's faces as their tails wagged so fast you could hardly see them. The happy parents laughed and dropped the family's food on the ground.

The two wolves hadn't managed to have full litters, only managing to have one eldest son and a younger daughter. But that was all they needed.

"Now, now, children settle down! We've got breakfast for you" the male wolf said to his cubs who sat down at command in front of him. Their wide eyes stared at the deer in front of them.

"Wow, you got deer! Is it a special occasion?" The eldest cub asked.

Usually when they had deer it was for a special event or birthday, not a random Tuesday morning in May. His younger sister had never even tried deer before. She was still too young to speak but her black eyes stared at the bodies in front of her, drool dripping from her mouth.

Their mother smiled down at them. "No special occasion, we just got lucky today. We'll take these inside so we're not in the open and you can enjoy your food."

"Are you not eating?" the eldest cub asked his parents.

The male wolf licked at the red around the fur of his mouth. "We already ate at the hunt. We'll finish off whatever you don't want and have the rest for dinner, how about that?"

The two cubs howled happily and led the way into the family's burrow. The burrow had been the male wolf's childhood home passed down through the generations of his ancestors. When his parents died, the burrow was passed down to him, the eldest cub, and he settled down with his wife here, and had eventually had their two children.

The burrow was essentially a hole beneath a great oak tree. Over the years the wolves had buried further around the ground of the tree to widen the space of their home. There was space for the family to huddle together to keep warm as they slept through the night, and a space where the family ate their food together away from the evil eyes of any human. The entry to the burrow was concealed with a heavy piece of wood which the two parents put in place by pushing it with their noses. The children were under strict rules not to move it unless they were greeting their parents. Light was let in through small windows scattered across the walls of their home in the bark of the tree.

When the cubs had finished eating, they lay on their backs staring up at the ceiling, their tiny bellies full and protruding from their fur. The parents smiled and ate the rest of what the cubs didn't want and pushed the second deer to the side which they would eat for dinner.

"Can we do something today, papa? I'd love to go on a walk and see the meadow you and mama are always talking about" the eldest cub asked, looking up at his father with big puppy eyes.

The male wolf looked over to his wife who was startled at the question. He didn't want to risk the humans seeing them, but he felt guilty that his children couldn't roam nature as he did when he was young.

"How about it, my love?" The male wolf said to his wife. "They've barely seen the outside world - they're going to have to learn to hunt at some point."

His wife thought for a moment looking between her two children. “Oh, alright. I guess an hour or two won’t hurt.”

“Yes! I can’t wait!” The eldest cub shouted, running to his parents. His little sister stood up at the excitement of her brother and wagged her tail.

“Can we go now?” The eldest cub asked.

“I think we should whilst it’s still relatively early” the male wolf said. “However, children, we need to go over some rules. You’ve heard the stories of the humans who hunt our kind, they’re incredibly dangerous so you need to stick by mama and I’s side, okay?”

The eldest cub nodded and the youngest wagged her tail walking to her mother. The parents went over rules of sticking together and doing as they’re told to make sure the children understood. Once they were ready to go, they dragged the eaten body of the deer outside and hid it behind some trees, then set off on their walk.

The cubs were ecstatic to explore the meadow near their burrow. They pranced through the long grass and chased butterflies along a beaten path. The family found a glittering stream of cool water where they stopped to have a drink. The cubs laughed at the small frogs jumping along the steppingstones in the water and tried to chase them. The youngest cub fell into the water and barked in panic as the female wolf quickly got her out.

“I think it might be time we teach you both how to swim” the female wolf said making sure her youngest cub was okay.

“I think you might be right” the male wolf said walking down to the stream, which was shallow enough for him to stand in, but deep enough for the cubs to swim. “Swimming should come naturally to you both. Just jump in and kick your front and back legs to stay afloat. I won’t let you get hurt.”

The eldest cub went first as the youngest was still shaken from her fall. He stood at the edge of the grass next to the stream and prepared to jump. He took a few paces backwards and ran forward launching himself into the air. As he was about to land in the water, a loud gunshot rang through the forest.

The pup yelped and landed in the water, his father ran towards him and yanked him out of the stream.

“Are you hurt? Answer me!” the male wolf shouted. The female wolf ran over with the youngest cub next to her.

“I’m fine, papa. That loud bang just scared me. What was it?”

“Humans” the male wolf said looking at his wife in terror.

“We need to get out of here now, back to the burrow everyone, and quickly!” The female wolf said grabbing the youngest cub by the neck to carry her.

The family began to run back in the direction that they came from as fast as they could. They could hear the strange sounds coming from behind them which the male wolf instantly recognised as human. All he could feel was the terror of the humans chasing them down, and the guilt that he has put his family in danger.

“Come on, son, that’s it, run fast” the male wolf shouted to the eldest cub who was struggling, but managing to keep up with his parents.

The family sprinted past the long grass and down the beaten path where the children had been chasing butterflies. Somehow the sounds of the humans were getting louder.

*There must be more of them*, the male wolf thought.

Suddenly a gunshot much louder than the one before rang through the wolves’ ears, but all they could hear was the yelp of pain from their eldest cub. They stopped in their tracks and turned to see the small body of their cub, red all over his fur. His eyes were wide-open, unblinking. He was dead.

The female wolf made a sound her husband had never heard before. She dropped her youngest who whined at the sight of her brother. The female wolf kept nudging her son, but he wouldn’t wake up. Two more gunshots came from the trees and the female wolf collapsed next to her cub’s body. She yelped in pain as blood covered her body. She looked at her husband and her youngest child.

“Go! Please, save her, save her, go!” She yelled.

“No! I can’t leave you, please grab him and get up, let’s go, my love” the male wolf cried.

The female shouted at them to run one last time before her head fell onto the ground. Her eyes slowly closed, and she stopped breathing. The female wolf lay with her son, it almost looked like they were cuddling, asleep in the burrow. But the reality for the male wolf was something he never could imagine. The cold terror that ran through him at the sight of his dead wife and son. He looked down at his youngest child who was still crying. The sounds of the humans were getting closer.

He grabbed his cub by the neck and ran, he didn’t know where to go but he ran as fast as he could. He ran past the burrow and he saw his family home, he couldn’t go back there. He kept running. The adrenaline of being hunted kept him going even after he stopped hearing the humans.

Eventually as the sun began to set, he stopped and looked around him. He didn’t know where he was, all he could see was dry land and dead grass. He lay his cub on the ground to check up on her - she hadn’t made a noise in a while. When he looked at his daughter on the ground he nearly collapsed. Her fur too was crimson red, she had been shot.

She lay unmoving on the cold, dry ground. He didn’t understand how he didn’t notice. Her small body lay underneath him, and he slumped down next to her and began to cry.

He didn’t stop crying until morning the next day. How his life had turned completely upside down in the matter of hours broke him inside. He wished he had never left the burrow with his family, he wished the humans didn’t exist, he wished he could kill them all.

A thought came into his mind then, and he decided what he needed to do. But first, he needed to put his little girl to rest. His little girl who had barely gotten to live.

He dug a deep hole in the dry ground and placed his youngest cub inside of it. There were no flowers around to put in the grave. Everything was dead. He simply filled the hole in with dirt, apologising to her for failing her.

As he filled the hole, not only was he burying his daughter, he was burying his son, his wife, and the life they had all shared together. He was burying his old self.

From that moment on he would put onto the humans the pain they had put onto him. He vowed to kill any human he would ever come across until the day he died.

...

It had been a half year since the wolf had lost his family. He had kept to his word and killed any human he ever came across. It was the only way to numb his grief, and to try and get any justice for his wife and children. Though he had tried to find them, he hadn't seen the hunt since they killed his family. His only other way of getting revenge was to kill individuals or groups of innocent men, women and children. He didn't feel remorse.

Sometimes he wondered if he had gone crazy but the reality that their kind not only killed his family, but countless other wolves too, reassured him that what he was doing was completely adequate. He wouldn't feel remorse.

He spent most of his days wandering around forests he had never been to before, imagining his children running ahead of him exploring, his wife by his side. He slept in random places he found or just lay down on the path he was walking along. He wasn't afraid of humans finding and hurting him anymore. He was the monster now.

As he slept, he would dream of his old life at the burrow with his family and when he would wake up, cold and alone, it only fuelled his incentive to carry on with his revenge. It was this day he accidentally stumbled on the place his family had been killed. He wasn't expecting to see the place where his old life had ended. He took his anger out on an old human woman later. He went back afterwards and noticed three flowers growing from where his family was shot and killed. He carried on walking.

He was wandering in the shadows when he saw a flash of red in the corner of his eye. Intrigued, he stopped and looked again more closely. Glimpses of the shade of blood passed between the trees and the wolf followed to see what it was. As he got closer, he realised it was a human girl, wearing a bright crimson red cape. She was skipping towards the place he had made his most recent kill, the elderly woman.

Licking his lips, the wolf followed the girl into the shadows.